

SPIRITUAL TRACTS, No. 9.

SPIRITUALISM,

AS DEMONSTRATED

FROM ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORY.

A LECTURE, DELIVERED IN NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 6, 1859,

BY JUDGE EDMONDS.

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Where is truth to be found? Such is the demand which comes up from thousands to whose attention the marvels of spiritual intercourse are presented. It was once said to me by one of profound knowledge and distinguished character, "Oh Truth! Truth! what is truth? So difficult to find on earth, is it equally difficult to know what is truth in heaven?"

If it be true that man is the creature of progression—if it is indeed his destiny to advance onward forever in knowledge as well as in love and purity—then it must of necessity be a gradual process to obtain knowledge. Man's power of obtaining and receiving it must be ever variant and ever changing, and there must be conditions in his existence in which his capacity to receive it must be imperfect. Behold how slow has been the progress among mankind of many truths now implicitly received! Centuries passed after the annunciation of the true principle of the planetary system before it was embraced. Hundreds of years elapsed before Aristotle's philosophy of the syllogism gave way to Bacon's wiser philosophy of induction. The same law obtains in moral as in natural science. How slow was man's advance to the idea of one God, instead of a host of deities, and how long even after that, and through what difficulties, the tenet of his own immortality struggled into existence in his own consciousness!

Truth is like water—though the element remains ever the same, it assumes the form of the vessel into which it is poured;

and man's capacity to receive it, so long as it is less than infinite, must affect its advent to him.

Our search after truth must then be painful and toilsome. We must dig for our diamonds, amid the rubbish of darkness, ignorance, and imbecility, well assured by all experience that the reward of all our persistent and patient search is ever certain in the end.

It is amid such considerations that we ask, what is the truth in respect to communion between the Spirits of mortals who have passed beyond the grave, and men yet living upon earth?

The question is most important to us, for thus can be revealed to us what is the future condition of existence into which we are to be ushered, and how we can make our earth life most available as a preparation for the next. And thus alone can this work be done; for it is only through man that it ever has been, or ever can be, revealed to man. In vain do we reach forth a beseeching hand to nature for the revelation. It has spoken for ages—animate and inanimate—without disclosing to us what is the vast future that is awaiting us. It is through the attributes of humanity, and to them alone, that the knowledge can be addressed, and man must depend upon his fellow-man for his enlightenment on this most momentous of topics.

Behold, then, how imperfectly the truth must approach us—how imperfect is our capacity to receive it, and how our pathway must be beset with anxiety, doubt, and error! What then? Shall we abandon the pursuit because it is difficult? Shall we cast away the whole product of the mine because the dust and rubbish predominate over the glittering metal? The truth comes to us surrounded with obscurity and enveloped in mystery and ignorance. What shall we do with it? Toil for it like wise men, or reject it like fools?

For my part, I choose to continue the search, and in the execution of that purpose I will lead your minds on this occasion to a rapid survey of the past, in the confident belief that amid the dust of ages, in which we must grope, we can find the jewel of great price. Our glance must necessarily be ra-

pid and general, for the limits of such a discourse will allow it to be nothing more than an index only to more minute researches by yourselves.

I say, then, that the truth of spiritual intercourse is proved by sacred history—by profane history—by the universal belief of mankind in all ages—by personal observation—by an unlimited amount of human testimony—and by the opinions of the wise and the good who have lived before us.

Sacred history embraces not merely Christianity, but all the religions ever known among men, and, I believe none has ever yet been believed which has not recognized a sensible, palpable communion between mortal man and the unseen intelligence which peoples the future.

This is particularly true of the Christian religion, and the Bible, whence it is derived, is full of it.

“An angel appeared to Hagar, (Gen. 16;) three, in the shape of men, appeared to Abraham, (Gen. 18;) and two to Lot, (Gen. 19.) One called to Hagar, (Gen. 21;) and to Abraham, (Gen. 22;) one spake to Jacob in a dream, (Gen. 31;) one appeared to Moses, (Exodus 3;) one went before the camp of Israel, (Exodus 14;) one met Balaam by the way, (Numbers 22;) one spake to *all* the children of Israel, (Judges 2;) one spake to Gideon, (Judges 6;) and to the wife of Manoah, (Judges 13;) one appeared to Elijah, (1 Kings 19;) one stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan, (1 Chron. 21;) one talked with Zachariah, (Zach. 1;) one appeared to the two Marys at the sepulcher, (Matt. 28;) one foretold the birth of John the Baptist, (Luke 1;) one appeared to the Virgin Mary, (Ibid;) to the shepherds, (Luke 2;) one opened the door of Peter's prison, (Acts 5;) two were seen by Jesus, Peter, and James, and John, (Luke 9;) and one spake to John the Evangelist, (Rev. 22.)

“It will not do to say these were angels—a distinct order of beings from man, for those seen by the apostles were Moses and Elias, and that seen by John, though called by him an angel, avowed himself to be his fellow-servant, and ‘one of his brethren the prophets.’”

In *Fetichism*, the lowest order of religion received by men, where “stocks and stones” are the primary objects of worship, the connection between the visible and the invisible worlds is ever recognized—dimly, faintly, to be sure, but ever recognized as a reality.

In *Brahmanism*, the avatars of their Vishnu, or God the preserver, embrace the idea of his repeated visits to man, and there is taught the constant interference in human affairs of minor intelligences, numbering, I think, some 330,000,000.

In *Lamaism* the continual personal presence of the Unseen, in their Grand Lama, is recognized.

And in *Mahommedanism*, it is a tenet that from the birth to the grave two Spirits are ever in attendance on each mortal in his earth-life.

Thus, in all the religions ever known among men, and in all now recognized upon earth, the idea embraced in the belief of spiritual intercourse is taught and received.

But we are not confined to religious history for the idea—it is found in some form in the profane history of the world, and in the universal belief of mankind in all ages.

In the early days of Paganism, those whom we recognize as the Spirits of departed inhabitants of the earth, were worshiped as deities. They were clothed with human attributes; they were often but deified men; they were not superior to, but were controlled by, nature's laws; they worked miracles; they interfered in human affairs, and communed directly with the living. That religion did indeed acknowledge the existence of Fate as superior to their divinities, but it recognized no great God of all. In their blindness, and, perhaps, to the extent of their capacity to understand, the Pagan world worshiped the unseen intelligence that was nearest and most palpable to them, and whose presence, ever in their midst, they most fully realized.

This spiritual presence, which they thus recognized, though tainted, as we now receive it, with human infirmities, was yet in their conception ever benign in its character, and not malevolent or evil.

Some two thousand years ago, while the whole world, except Judea, was Pagan, came Zoroaster as the reformer of the religion of the East, and by him was taught "the doctrine of an eternal Spirit of good, and an eternal Spirit of evil, with a vast number of inferior good and bad genii."

Through his teachings, and by means of their association with the Assyrians, and not from their book of the law—for, except in the poem of Job, the existence of a Devil is scarcely mentioned in the Old Testament—the Jews added to their be-

lief in one God and in the communion with angels, the belief in a Spirit of evil, as represented in one great master Spirit, and in many lesser ones.

Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of the Christian religion, found this belief in devils fast rooted in the Jewish faith at his advent to earth. It had not its origin with him. He found it there, and recognized it as a truth. He superadded to the advance which mankind had already made in their knowledge on this subject, the knowledge how man could overcome that Spirit of evil, and how cast it out from his midst. Christianity took up the idea, and bore it along the stream of time. It taught that devils could work miracles, and were ever present influencing man. It taught, during the three first centuries of the Christian era, that upon every child born on earth, a demon was ever attendant, and fear of the invisible power was the great instrument by which the priesthood ruled the people. Born among Judaism and Paganism—taking its hue in some degree from both—teaching that the Pagan divinities were devils, and that devils were an eternal Spirit of evil—Christianity worked more on the sentiment of terror than of affection. Hence, in every convulsion of nature, in the pestilence that walked at noon-day, and in individual suffering and degradation, the early Christians acknowledged the ever-abiding presence of fallen angels, at the same time that they recognized the daily communion of the saints—the Spirits of just men made perfect. So wide-spread was this belief in this evil presence, and so baneful its influence, that one of the fathers of the church, St. Augustin, as early as the sixth century, found it necessary to attempt to mitigate the evil, if not to eradicate the idea.

Behold, then, how man had progressed in this respect, up to the third century, when Christianity became an acknowledged religion. It was universally acknowledged that Spirits from beyond the grave did commune with the earth's inhabitants, and interfere in human affairs; that they were both good and evil, and that man had power over them. But what was the

extent of that power, and what the limit of the capacity of the surrounding Spirits for good or evil, was as yet unknown.

In this condition of human belief ages rolled on, fear being the sentiment most predominant in respect to Spirit-influence, and the teachers of the people affording no relief, but adding superstition and bigotry to the burden, impelled by their own ignorance and the strong temptation of using fear as the instrument of cementing their power.

Then came the invasion of the barbarians of the north of Europe, bringing with it all the wild superstitions of Druidism, and a firm belief in man's immortality and communion with the unseen world. That invasion repelled Paganism, with all its knowledge, and all its Grecian and Roman refinement, and embraced Christianity as most consonant with its own belief. And from this source flowed what we call the "dark ages," when ignorance and superstition settled like a dark pall upon Christendom, and the belief in the abiding presence of the Spirit-world was universal, affecting all parties, and influencing all of human action. Religion made the belief blindly superstitious, because religion was ignorant. All-pervading and perverted to selfish purposes, it assumed the form of alchemy, astrology, magic, and witchcraft. The absurdities of the Romish Paganism and the superstitions of the barbarians were interwoven with it, and man's terror in vain resorted to persecution to eradicate it; and during a period of three centuries, hundreds of thousands of victims fell a sacrifice.

But out of this persecution sprang the most important idea—that man was himself individually responsible for the influence which it exerted over and through him. Hence it was that so many were slain for being possessed, and it was only through this immense suffering that the mighty truth was born, that man is indeed himself responsible for the influence which the Spirit-world may exercise over him.

Let us pause a moment and behold the progress made up to the fourteenth century, and we will see that while ignorance, blindness, bigotry and superstition have walked hand-in-hand

to and fro on the earth, human knowledge also advanced with equal strides. We have been in the habit of looking upon the crusades, which for three centuries poured the population of Europe upon Asia, and whitened the plains of Syria with the bones of expiring millions, and all for the inconsiderable purpose of wresting the birth-place of Jesus from the possession of the infidel, as the maddest display of useless fanaticism that the history of the world can produce. Yet, standing at this distance from that era, we can see how that insane enthusiasm, as we call it, was the means, under Providence, of arresting the onward progress of Mahommedanism, which, in its more intense fanaticism, having swept over Asia and Africa, was treading on the verge of Christendom, and threatening its subjugation. So, amid the darkness and persecution which for centuries attended the belief in Spirit-intercourse, we can see how the weighty truth was promulgated to man, that he could control it and was responsible for its action, and how he was being prepared for its advent on earth.

Thus came, as the product of ages of experience, the belief in Spirit-intercourse—that it was for good and for evil, that we can govern it, and that we are responsible for its action.

But when that idea of man's responsibility was fully received, it was for a while fearful in its effects, and culminated in the fifteenth century. It was then that Pope Innocent VIII promulgated his Bull against Witchcraft, and a council of cardinals, appointed by him, sent forth to the world "The Hammer of Witchcraft," in which was minutely detailed all the signs by which the possession could be detected, and how the victims should be tried and punished. Thousands upon thousands perished in consequence. No class or condition of society was exempt from the persecution. Received as a dogma of the religion, even Popes complained that their councils were bewitched, and the highest in rank found it difficult to escape the charge when pointed by malevolence and directed by superstition.

This state of things, terrible as it was, was yet a wise dispensation, for out of its very extremity grew man's emancipa-

tion from the superstition which had so long tyrannized over his faith in spiritual intercourse. All classes being in danger, had a common interest of opposition, and all classes—clergy and laity—soon manifested their hostility. Writers of every condition warred upon the prevailing belief, and in spite of papal mandates, the clergy began to speak out. The pendulum, disturbed from its perpendicular, vibrated far on the other side, and it soon became the fashion to seize upon the absurdities which had once been credited, and arguing from their impossibility, deny *in toto*, not only witchcraft, magic, astrology, and alchemy, with all their extravagances, but even the possibility of any intercourse with the unseen Spirit-world.

Thus Christendom progressed, until at the end of the eighteenth century was inaugurated the age of unbelief, when the goddess of Reason was worshiped, instead of the beneficent Father, and it was regarded as indicative of ignorance and weakness to believe even in the possibility of communion with the dead.

Such has been the progress of mankind in their dealing with this great idea which we embrace, and prominent in all that progress has been the priesthood, lagging behind the advancement of the age, and hanging like an incubus on its progress. Out of that progress our age has emerged, with this mighty movement springing up simultaneously in all parts of the earth, and leading its millions in captivity. What shall we do with it? And where shall we fly for refuge? Shall it be amid the devotion of Paganism, worshiping the creature rather than the Creator? Shall it be in the age of superstition, trembling with horror at its manifestation? Shall it be in the era of alchemy and astrology, with all their absurdities? Shall it be in the time of persecution, acknowledging responsibility, but ignorant of our control? Shall it be in the period of infidelity, when with our lips we deny that which the immortal instinct within us compels us to recognize? Or shall it be in the reign of reason, when we may know that now, as of old, the Spirits of the dead may commune with us; that we are responsible for its influence, that we can control it, and can

learn how to do so? Is there no medium for us between blind faith and knowledge? between fanaticism and infidelity? between superstition and reason? Can we, amid this deluge of time, find no Ararat on which our ark may rest, and whence we may send forth our dove to return with its olive branch, rather than the raven to perish amid the desert waste of waters, and return no more?

Let us, however, ever bear in mind that amid all the discouragements, difficulties and errors that attend our researches, the truth can be found by the persevering investigator. Truth and error are, in mortal life, ever mingled together, and it is the part of wisdom to separate them, and not reject the truth, because error often sits down beside it and assumes its guise.

The causes which give error so much predominance, are frequently to be found in ourselves. The philosopher, inflated by the idea of his own superior knowledge, and to increase the reverence for himself, is often apt to disguise and conceal the truths he has discovered. Partially succeeding only in his researches, he hastily jumps to a conclusion and pauses not for the maturity of his discoveries; and dreading the persecution which so often attends the announcement of a new truth, he is frequently tempted to suppress or deny it. These propositions are as true in moral as in natural science, and we can be cheered in our investigations, into the truths of spiritual knowledge, by the experience of the past.

Roger Bacon, six hundred years ago amid the absurdities and credulity of magic, claimed the power to raise thunder, control the lightning, and create rain. With him it was untried theory, but realized in part by our Franklin, who disarmed the lightning of its destructiveness, and by our Morse, who, making it an instrument of transmitting thought, has bound it to the car of our knowledge, and made it an obedient vassal to the supremacy of human intellect. Lord Bacon, over two hundred years ago, shadowed forth the steam engine. Astrology, which long preyed upon human credulity, yet caused so many observations of the heavenly bodies, that the

thought enunciated by Pythagoras six hundred years before Christ, was fully born under the auspices of Galileo two thousand years afterward. Van Helmont, in his blind search for the elixir of life, found the spirits of hartshorn, and Paracelsus discovered laudanum. The pursuit of the philosopher's stone, or the art of making gold, added to chemistry many of its most valued truths. Gunpowder came in an anagram, and the Kaleidoscope slumbered for two centuries in Baptista Porta's natural magic.

These great truths, buried amid the rubbish of the past, have in our day, and guided by our spirit of intelligent and manly inquiry, sprung into active and effective existence. Admonished by these things, may we not, out of the credulity and superstition of former times, find the truth as to spiritual intercourse? Nay, have we not already found it? Let the history of the last two centuries answer.

In two ancient works lately falling under my notice, (Dr. John Dee's *Dealings with Spirits*, published in 1659; and Glanvil's *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, published in 1681,) I have found an account of manifestations two hundred and three hundred years since, identical with those of to-day. The faith of the Methodists under Wesley, and of the Quakers under George Fox, was inaugurated one hundred years ago, under the same influence. The manifestations through Swedenborg in the last century, were of the same character. The thirty years' war which attended the reformation under Luther and Melancthon, was accompanied by a lively display of the same power. The preaching mania, which so much disturbed both the church and the government in Sweden in 1842, was the same as our trance-mediumship. And now modern Spiritualism, much contemned as it is, has within the last ten years sprung up in all parts of the earth, everywhere bearing the same characteristics, under circumstances which absolutely preclude all idea of collusion—often betrayed but never exposed; defying the utmost severity of investigation to which human ingenuity can subject it; calling to its aid, thousands of intelligent witnesses; invoking human testimony, which no

same mind can disregard; and establishing a marvel unsurpassed in the history of mankind; namely, the marvel of inanimate matter moving without mortal contact, and displaying intelligence, and that intelligence embracing a knowledge of the alphabet, of reading, writing and arithmetic; speaking in many tongues, and reading human thought, and revealing to us what purports to be the Spirit life, with details which no imagination can fabricate.

Now, may we not ask, whence comes this, and what produces it?

The man of science denounces it as superstition, the man of the world calls it delusion, and the religionist characterizes it as satanic. We, on the other hand, insist that we must believe the evidence of our senses, and the deductions of our reason—that we can not reject the overwhelming evidence that is all around us. We insist that there is no other hypothesis but that of spiritual intercourse which can give any solution to the phenomena we behold. And we insist that there is a power now at work in our very midst, capable of producing marvelous results, which is well worthy the investigation of the learned, rather than their scoffs and sneers.

If in these claims we are beside ourselves, we have at least the consolation of knowing that we err in the company of the good and the wise of past ages. A few illustrations will show this.

Socrates says: "The cause of this is that which you have often and in many places heard me mention; because I am moved by a certain divine and spiritual influence, which also Melitus through mockery has set out in the indictment. This began with me from childhood, being a kind of voice which, when present, always diverts me from what I am about to do, but never urges me on. But this duty, as I said, has been enjoined me by the Deity, by oracles, by dreams, and by every mode by which any other divine decree has ever enjoined anything for man to do."—*Cary's Works of Plato, Apology of Socrates.*

Cicero says: "Now, as far as I know, there is no nation whatever, however polished and learned, or however barbarous and uncivilized, which does not believe it possible that future

events may be indicated, understood, and predicted by certain persons."—*De Divinatione, lib. 1.*

Pope, besides his *Essay on Man*, writes: "I shall depend on your constant friendship, like the trust we have in benevolent Spirits, who, though we never hear or see them, we think are constantly praying for us."

Dryden writes:

"The mighty ghosts of our great Harrys rose,
And armed Edwards looked with anxious eyes."

Milton says:

"Millions of Spirits walk the world unseen
Both when we wake and when we sleep:
There execute their airy purposes
And works of love and enmity fulfill."

Addison writes: "At the same time, I think, a person who is thus terrified with the imagination of ghosts and specters much more reasonable than one who, contrary to the reports of all historians, sacred and profane, ancient and modern, and to the traditions of all nations, thinks the appearance of Spirits fabulous and groundless. Could I not give myself up to this general testimony of mankind, I should to the revelations of particular persons, who are now living, and whom I can not distrust in other matters of fact. I might here add, that not only the historians, to whom we may join the poets, but likewise the philosophers of antiquity, have favored this opinion."
—*Spectator*, No. 110, July 6, 1711.

Johnson writes: "That the dead are seen no more," said Imlac, "I will not undertake to maintain against the concurrent and unvaried testimony of all ages and all nations. There is no people, rude or learned, among whom apparitions of the dead are not related and believed. This opinion, which perhaps prevails as far as human nature is diffused, could become universal only by its truth; those that never heard of one another would not have agreed in a tale which nothing but experience can make credible. That it is doubted by single cavilers can very little weaken the general evidence, and some who deny it with their tongues, confess it by their fears."—*Raselas*, chap. 31.

Josephus writes: "Glaphyra, the daughter of King Archelaus, after the death of her two first husbands, (being married to a third, who was brother to her first husband,) had a very odd kind of dream. She fancied that she saw her first husband coming toward her, and that she embraced him with great tenderness. When in the midst of the pleasure which

she expressed at the sight of him, he reproached her after the following manner: Glaphyra, says he, thou hast made good the old saying, that women are not to be trusted. Was not I the husband of thy virginity? Have I not children by thee? How couldst thou forget our loves so far as to enter into a second marriage, and after that into a third—nay, to take for thy husband a man who has so shamelessly crept into the bed of his brother? However, for the sake of our past loves, I shall free thee from thy present reproach, and make thee mine for ever. Glaphyra told this dream to several women of her acquaintance, and died soon after.

“I thought this story might not be impertinent in this place, wherein I speak of those kings. Beside, that the example deserves to be taken notice of, as it contains a most certain proof of the immortality of the soul and of Divine Providence. If any man thinks these facts incredible, let him enjoy his own opinion to himself, but let him not endeavor to disturb the belief of others, who by instances of this nature are excited to the study of virtue.”—*Antiquities of the Jews*, lib. 17, ch. 15, sec. 4, 5.

Cornelius Agrippa, (says D'Israeli, vol. 6, p. 55,) before he wrote his *Vanity of the Arts and Sciences*, in the sixteenth century, intended to reduce into a system and method the secret of communicating with Spirits and demons. On good authority, that of Porphyry, Psellus, Plotinus, Iamblicus—and on better, were it necessary to allege it—he was well assured that the upper regions of the air swarmed with what the Greeks called *daimones*, just as our lower atmosphere is full of birds, our waters with fish, and our earth of insects.

Yet of these worthies Socrates was condemned to death, because he corrupted the youth of Athens with his immortal truths; Pope was persecuted as an infidel, for a work which far outstripped his age, and is hardly yet acknowledged; and Agrippa, though learned enough to speak eight languages, and uniformly benevolent and kind, was universally avoided, and barely escaped the fagot. Where, indeed, is truth to be found except amid difficulty and error?

And now let us pause yet once again, and ask what is it that the opponents of our faith demand?

They ask us to yield to their opinion, against the universal

belief of mankind in all ages; against the teachings of sacred history of all religions; against the testimony of profane history as to all nations; against human testimony which the human intellect can not disregard; against the evidence of our own senses, without which we could not live; and against the opinions of the wise and the good in many ages.

Nay, they ask even yet more. They demand that we acknowledge that man has attained the end of his knowledge of the works and the word of God, and that, though in former times and places He has once and again spoken to man through His ministering Spirits, He can not, and will not, thus speak to him again; that the glory which once descended and sat between the wings of the Cherubim, has faded alike from the sight and the memory of man; that the light which once shone on Mount Sinai is extinguished, and forever! Can this be so?

No, my friends, it is not; it can not be. If there is faith to be placed in human testimony—if the past can speak its lessons of wisdom to the present; if it is the destiny of man to move onward ever in the pathway of knowledge—we must believe that the Spirits of the departed do commune with us; that a power has entered into our midst and abides with us, which we yet may know; and which can work marvelous things in the sight of God and angels; and we may be well assured that the time is not distant, though it may not be in my day nor in yours, when the work which has been begun so feebly in the present, will be finished in the future by elevating us, both physically and morally, yet nigher and nigher to Him who has created us in His own image.